Theater to reopen soon

☐ New Liberty in Camas is shaping up thanks to a $360,000 restoration after a fire damaged it in August 1994

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
The Columbian

CAMAS — For months, the lighted marquee of the New Liberty Theatre has read, "Coming Soon."

That's not such a stretch anymore.

Wayne Ratliff, a spokesman for Lease Crutcher Lewis Contractors, said restoration of the one-screen theater might be finished by the end of December, and the business could reopen as early as Jan. 1.

In August 1994, an accidental three-alarm fire gutted the downtown Camas landmark at 315 N.E. Fourth Ave.

> "We know they're going to open. We just don't know exactly when. We'll be ready."
> — Rich Galt

Lease Crutcher Lewis, a Seattle-based company, was supposed to begin restoration in March, but survey crews found that the damage was more extensive than they originally had planned for.

Rebuilding was going to cost more and take more time.

So the owners of the building, the Farrell family, appealed to their insurance company for a bigger settlement, causing a long delay.

Work on the $360,000 project started up again in mid-September, Ratliff said.

By the end of the job, Ratliff said his crew of about 20 will have replumbed, rewired, repainted, enlarged the bathrooms and added new concession counters and seats.

Photos by JEREMIAH COUGHLAN/ The Columbian

***(Above)* Jeff Downer of Columbia Electric wires a wall sconce on the ceiling of the Liberty Theatre in Camas. *(Right)* A worklight throws Eric Holyk's shadow against the wall of the projection booth as he saws. Holyk works for Lease Crutcher Lewis Contractors.**

Also, the 66-year-old theater will have a new projector and sound system.

The operators of the business before the fire, Cathy Asher and Toni Ness, will not return.

Their lease of the building was not renewed by the Farrells after the fire.

A Los Angeles man, Greg Wood, will take over the business, but he is moving and was unavailable for comment.

The community, which rallied around the theater and raised $10,000 for its restoration, will hold a big party whenever the new New Liberty Theatre opens its doors, said Rich Galt, executive director of the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce.

"We know they're going to open," Galt said. "We just don't know exactly when.

"We'll be ready."

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